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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000222

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/16/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [SL](#)  
SUBJECT: LIMITED CAPACITY, RISING CRIME: SIERRA LEONE  
POLICE STRUGGLE

REF: FREETOWN 217

Classified By: Political Officer Amy LeMar for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

**¶11. (C) Summary:** The security situation in Sierra Leone, always fragile, appears to have grown increasingly tenuous in recent weeks. Concerns over rising levels of violent crime, both in Freetown and across the country, are compounded by the decreasing capacity of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) to respond effectively to calls. The SLP is ill-equipped to coordinate an effective anti-crime operation or control any outbreak of civil unrest, given the current shortfall of resources, leadership, equipment, and training. SLP sources note that without effective police intervention, opportunistic`q{})QQ

**¶12. (C)** Although a cyclical rise in crime is to be expected as the rainy season begins (noise of break-ins can be camouflaged by heavy rains, and SLP response is expected to be slower due to poor roads), the incidents this year strike sources as more frequent, more violent, and more widespread than in previous years. An SLP source notes that violent crime and armed robberies are on the rise in the East of Freetown (particularly Calaba Town, Cline Town, and Wellington). Criminal gangs in these areas operate boldly, repeatedly striking in the same neighborhoods. The gangs carry and use their weapons, and victims have reportedly been shot in the thigh and shoulder. A source expressed concern that these gangs may soon begin to target the expatriates, INGO's, and diplomatic houses located in the more affluent western area of Freetown.

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Regional Violence  
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**¶13. (C)** The criminal activity has not been restricted to Freetown. In Mambolo village in the North Eastern province, a mob burned a church to the ground and destroyed the village water purification system (reftel). Villagers reported that the village had been visited by smaller mobs twice in the days preceding the burning, and that despite SLP knowledge of the issue and presence in the village, the perpetrators were still able to burn the church and escape from the scene. Other small-scale incidents have been reported in the Southern Province, and a recent meeting in Bo between the SLP, political parties, and civil society organizations indicated a lack of confidence from the public about the police's ability to adequately control crowds and enforce public order.

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SLP CAPACITY  
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**¶14. (C)** The SLP currently suffer from a severe fuel shortage, as well as internal discord over the coordination of the force. Some of the Assistant Inspector Generals (AIG) believe that the Inspector General (IG) is running the SLP as a private business, and that the motivation to keep violent crime in check competes with the profit motive. Local Unit Commanders lack guidance and frequently operate independently of the hierarchy; there appears to be no strategy for comprehensively addressing the apparent increase in violent crime. Without a clear line of command and control, the SLP is often unable to carry out relatively simple response

operations, and would struggle to control any kind of sustained civil unrest without resorting to violence themselves.

15. (C) Although the SLP runs night patrols in some Freetown neighborhoods, the police are generally frustrated by their inability to respond to criminal incidents. The SLP's severe fuel shortage leaves most of the force idle at headquarters, unable to patrol or to respond in a timely fashion. A source reported that only 20 of 200 individuals in a division are currently able to be deployed on patrol. An AIG ran out of fuel in Freetown and was informed by the IG that he would have to purchase the fuel himself to continue his work (Note: The Ministry of Finance was slow to provide the SLP with their second quarter government transfer, which created at least some of the material deficiencies. End note.). Criminals are aware that the SLP's response capacity is minimal, and the gangs are becoming increasingly confident and audacious in their actions.

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16. (C) The SLP is currently awaiting replenishment of \$1 million of riot control equipment from the UN. The procurement process has been slow, though needed tear gas stocks were recently received. Although the SLP received riot control training from the DFID-funded Commonwealth Police Team, they do not have the appropriate equipment or the command and control staffs numbering in the hundreds, the SLP's ineffectiveness Q@QfS&}ZQency in resources and ,OjQlQ#Qme of his appointment in 2003 to reorganize a corrupt and decrepit QQJmB(qited resources has not been his strong suit. A change at the IG level, however, will not change the amount the SLP receive in operational funding, nor necessarily their ability to use it. As petty and violent crime increases against a backdrop of growing transnational organized crime in Sierra Leone and throughout the region, further assistance to civilian security entities will be vital for preserving peace and stability. The mood of a June 9 meeting of international community members discussing security sector reform was bleak. End comment.

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